

God

Existence, Nature, and Attributes

How do we know anything (epistemology)? - Four Ways to Knowledge

Intuition: Confidence or belief that comes from the mind. Examples of knowledge based on intuition: time and eternity; cause and effect; right and wrong; mathematical demonstration; self-existence; existence of matter. Universally humans believe (intuitively) in God.

Tradition: Truth that is passed down from generation to generation

Reason: Rational faculty to recognize order and meaning in the universe. Examples of knowledge based on reason: intrinsic value; accomplishments

Revelation: Scripture

Note: Knowledge based on the first three (intuition, tradition, reason) may be incorrect.

Proof of the existence of God

One cannot “prove” the existence of God with the scientific method, neither can one prove that Abraham Lincoln ever existed but in both cases, sufficient evidence can be found to allow anyone to come to a rational conclusion that Lincoln existed and God exists. There are many things that are real that cannot be measured or proven to exist but we believe in them - love, compassion, justice, etc.

Some classical arguments for the Existence of God

Cosmological Argument

The cosmos exists and there are some alternatives to explain its existence.

1. Nature is eternal and its forms have existed forever (not likely)
2. Matter has existed forever, though subject to self-development (not likely)
3. Matter is created by the power of God

Every effect has a cause. The effect depends on its cause for its existence. Nature cannot produce itself. There must have been a producer/creator – we call that person God.

Thomas Aquinas (1224-1274) had a version of the Cosmological Argument called the Argument from Motion. He stated that things in motion could not have brought themselves into motion but must be caused to move. There cannot be an infinite regression of movers. Therefore, there must be an Unmoved Mover. This Unmoved Mover is God.

Teleological Argument

Order and design in the universe - endless illustration.

“A rational mind behind the universe which Christians identify as God.”

Evidence of design both telescopic and microscopic.

Rom 1:20 For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse.

Anthropological Argument

Personality, intellect, sensibility, will and moral features of conscience.

Ontological Argument- St. Anselm (AD 1033-1109) (probably not the most powerful argument)
Humans could not have the idea of God unless something exists that corresponds to it.

Aesthetics Argument

Beauty and truth - absolute standard

Arguments from Revelation - Bible

Proofs in the following categories:

Cosmological argument (God as the only power capable of creating the universe and everything in it)

Ontological argument (God has placed within us a knowledge that He exists and cares for us)

Moral argument (God has placed a moral law in our hearts which testify of His law)

Argument from fulfilled prophecy (the Bible provides us with evidence of its validity through over 2,000 fulfilled prophecies)

Scripture related to self-existence

Psalm 90:2 John 1:1-5 Acts 17:22-31 Col 1:15-20 Rev 1:8

Opposing Views and Other Concepts of God

Atheism - denial that God exists (rare ,theoretically not provable – cannot prove non-existence unless omniscient)

Agnosticism - insufficient proof for Deity

Evolution - unproved theory

Materialism - denies the immaterial (spiritual)

Polytheism - more than one god, many deities - satanic deception involved in many false religions

Idealism and Realism - ultimate reality is the idea - Plato, Realism - perfection is in real objects

Pantheism - God is everything and everything is God

Deism - God abandoned His creation

Positivism - Only know what you can observe, no supernatural

Monism - attempts to reduce all reality to one ultimate principle or substance

Dualism - more than one reality of existence, (good/evil), (body/mind)

Pluralism - many worlds as there are minds to make them

A question you need to be able to answer:

If God created everything, who created God?

Answer: God is self-existent. At first this seems unsatisfactory but think about this. Something exists today, you the world, etc. If nothing ever existed – who or what created what does exist? It must have been something or someone. It is irrational to believe that the universe created itself. Inanimate objects, rocks, etc. do not have the attributes that they can create other rocks. It is logical to assume that God created everything and that one of the attributes of God is self-existence. If God is not self-existent then nothing would or could ever exist.

The nature and attributes of God

Incomprehensibility

Swiss theologian Karl Barth was asked by a student, “Dr. Barth, what is the most profound thing you have ever learned in your study of theology?” Barth thought for a moment and then replied, “Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.”

(1) In the simplest Christian truth there resides a profundity that can occupy the minds of the most brilliant people for a lifetime

(2) Even in learned theological sophistication, we never really rise above the child’s level of understanding the mysterious depths and riches of the character of God.

It does not mean that we can know nothing about God but that we cannot fully comprehend the infinite, our knowledge is partial and limited.

Deu 29:29 (NASB) "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever..."

See also:

Job 38:1-41:34 Psalm 139:1-18 Isaiah 55:8-9 Romans 11:33-36 1 Cor 2:6-16

Triunity

A difficult and perplexing doctrine but one that is taught in scripture. The term trinity describes a relationship, not of three gods, but of one God who is three persons (one in essence and three in person). Scripture confirms the deity of the Father, Son and Holy Spirit.

Self-Existence

It is impossible for something to create itself. Every effect must have a cause, but God is not an effect. He has no beginning and therefore no antecedent cause. He is eternal. He has, within himself the power of being. We know of nothing else quite like this concept. We can’t fully comprehend anything as self-existent. It is a rationally valid notion. By contrast, the concept of self-creation violates the most basic law of reason, logic, and science – the law of non-contradiction. Self-existence is rational; self-creation is irrational.

See also:

Deu 6:4 Mat 3:16-17 Mat 28:19 2 Cor 13:14 1 Pet 1:2

Omnipotence

Can God make a rock so big that he cannot move it? If we answer yes, then we are saying that there is something God cannot do; He cannot move the rock. If we answer no, then we are saying that God cannot build such a rock. Either way we answer we are forced to place limits on God’s power.

The dilemma posed here, is a false dilemma. It is false because it is erected on a false premise. It assumes that “omnipotence” means that God can do anything. Yet, as a theological term, omnipotence does not mean that God can do anything. The Bible indicates several things that God cannot do. He cannot lie (Heb. 6:18). He cannot die. He cannot be eternal and created. He cannot act against His nature. He cannot be God and not be God at the same time and in the same respect.

What omnipotence does mean is that God holds all power over His creation. No part of creation stand outside the scope of His sovereign control.

God cannot build a rock so big that he cannot move it. Why? If God ever built such a rock He would be creating something over which He had no power. He would be destroying His own omnipotence. God cannot stop being God; He cannot not be omnipotent.

For the Christian, God’s omnipotence is a great source of comfort. We know that the same power God displayed in creating the universe is at His disposal to assure our salvation.

Omnipotence refers to God’s sovereign power, authority, and control over the created order.

See also:

Gen 17:1 Psalm 11:5:3 Rom 11:36 Eph 1:11 Heb 1:3

Omnipresence

When we speak of God's omnipresence we usually mean that His presence is in all places. There is no place where God is not. Yet, as spirit, God does not occupy any place, in the sense that physical objects occupy space. He has no physical qualities that can occupy space. To meet God, there is not a "where" to go or a "when" to occur. To be in the immediate presence of God is to step into another dimension.

The second aspect, "omni" relates not only to places where God is, but also to how much of Him is in any given place. God is not only present in all places but God is fully present in every place. Believers in New York enjoy the fullness of the presence of God while believers in Moscow enjoy that same presence. His immensity, then does not refer to His size, but to His ability to be fully present everywhere.

In addition to the reverence this doctrine engenders, the doctrine also proves to be comforting. When we are in God's presence, He is not preoccupied on the other side of the world.

Psa 139:7-10 (NASB) Where can I go from Thy Spirit? Or where can I flee from Thy presence? If I ascend to heaven, Thou art there; If I make my bed in Sheol, behold, Thou art there. If I take the wings of the dawn, If I dwell in the remotest part of the sea, Even there Thy hand will lead me, And Thy right hand will lay hold of me.

See also:

1 Kings 8:27 Job 11:7-9 Jer 23:23-24 Acts 17:22-31

Omniscience

"To have all (omni) knowledge (science)." It is a term that is properly applied to God alone. Only a being that is infinite and eternal is capable of knowing everything. God's superior knowledge allows Him to be able to resolve mysteries that baffle us. But that points to a different degree in God's knowledge, not a difference in kind of logic He uses. Statements such as, "That may all be contradictory to us, but it isn't in the mind of God." are false. God's omniscience is crucial in His role as the Judge of the world.

See also:

Psalm 147:5 Ezek 11:5 Acts 15:18 Rom 11:33-36 Heb 4:13

Holiness

The first prayer many of us learned was "God is great; God is good. And we thank Him for this food."

The two virtues assigned to God in this prayer, greatness and goodness, may be captured by one biblical word, holy. The idea of holy contain these virtues, but they are not the primary meaning of holiness.

Holy has two distinct meanings.

The primary meaning is "apartness" or "otherness." God is profoundly different from the creatures he created. It refers to God's transcendent majesty, His august superiority, by virtue of which He is worthy of our honor, reverence, adoration, and worship. He is "other" or different from us in His glory. When the Bible speaks of holy objects or holy people or holy time, it refers to things that have been set apart, consecrated, or made different by the touch of God upon them.

The secondary meaning of holy refers to God's pure and righteous actions. God does what is right. He never does what is wrong. His nature is holy. Because God is holy He is both great and good. There is no evil mixed in with His goodness.

When we are called to be holy, it does not mean that we share in God's divine majesty, but that we are to be different from our normal fallen sinfulness. We are called to mirror and reflect the moral character and activity of God. We are to imitate His goodness.

See also:

Exo 3:1-6 1 Sam 2:2 Psalm 99:1-9 Isa 6:1-13 Rev 4:1-11

Goodness

God is good and never changes, there is no other side ("shadow side") of God.

James 1:17 (NASB) Every good thing bestowed and every perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of lights, with whom there is no variation, or shifting shadow.

Not only is God altogether good (His character), He is consistently good. God doesn't know how to be anything but good. God is not said to be good because he obeys some cosmic law outside of Himself that

judges Him or because God so defines goodness that He can act in a lawless manner and by the sheer power of His authority declares His actions good. God's goodness is neither arbitrary or capricious. God does obey a law, but the law He obeys is the law of His own character. He is not only the ultimate standard of goodness; He is the Source of all goodness.

See also:

Exo 34:6-7 Psalm 25:8-10 Psalm 100:1-5 Romans 8:28-39 James 1:17

Justice

Aristotle defined justice as "giving a person what is his or her due." If a person is punished more severely than his crime deserves, the punishment is unjust. If a person receives a lesser reward than they have earned, then the reward is unjust.

Mercy and justice are obviously different thing, though they are sometimes confused. Mercy occurs when wrongdoers are given less punishment than deserved or greater reward than they earned. God tempers His justice with mercy. God is gracious to us when He withholds the punishment we deserve when He rewards our obedience despite the fact that we own obedience to Him, and so we do not merit any reward.

Mercy is always voluntary with God. He is never obligated to be merciful.

Rom 9:15 (NASB) For He says to Moses, "I WILL HAVE MERCY ON WHOM I HAVE MERCY, AND I WILL HAVE COMPASSION ON WHOM I HAVE COMPASSION."

We complain that if God pardons one person, He is therefore obligated to pardon everybody. Yet we see clearly in Scripture that God does not treat everybody equally. He revealed Himself to Abraham in a way He did not to any other pagans. He graciously appeared to Paul in a way He did not appear to Judas Iscariot.

Paul received grace from God; Judas received justice. Mercy and grace are forms of nonjustice, but they are not acts of injustice. When God is just, He is doing what is right.

Rom 9:14 (NASB) What shall we say then? There is no injustice with God, is there? May it never be!

See also:

Gen 18:25 Exo 34:6-7 Neh 9:32-33 Psalm 145:17 Rom 9:14-33

Works and Decrees

Creation

Everything in time and space has a beginning. Something cannot come from nothing. Nothing cannot do anything. Transcendence refers to level of being, not to geography.

Col 1:16 (NASB) For by Him all things were created, both in the heavens and on earth, visible and invisible, whether thrones or dominions or rulers or authorities-- all things have been created by Him and for Him.

See also:

Gen 1 Psalm 33:1-9 Psalm 104:24-26 Jer 10:1-16 Heb 11:3

Providence

The root meaning of the word providence is "to see in advance or beforehand", or "to provide for". The word fails to convey the deep meaning of the doctrine of providence. The doctrine signifies far more than that God is a spectator of human events. God rules His creation with absolute sovereignty and authority. He governs everything that comes to pass, from the greatest to the least. Nothing happens beyond the scope of His sovereign providential government.

There are no blind impersonal forces at work in human history. All is brought to pass by the invisible hand of Providence.

Another aspect of providence is called concurrence. Concurrence refers to the coterminous actions of God and human beings. We are creatures with a will of our own. We make things happen. Yet the causal power we exert is secondary. God's sovereign providence stands over and above our actions. He works out His will through the actions of human wills, without violating the freedom of those human wills.

Consider the case of Joseph and his brothers. *Gen 50:20 (NASB) "And as for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive."*

See also:

Job 38:1-41 Dan 4:34-35 Acts 2:22-24 Rom 11:33-36

Miracles

The term miracle tends to be used loosely today. A touchdown pass, a narrow escape, or the beauty of the sunset are routinely called miracles. But the term miracle can be used in three distinct ways.

The first describes common, but nonetheless impressive events. The birth of a baby, we call a miracle. In so doing, we honor God for the intricacy and beauty of His creation. We stand in awe of the cosmos.

Here the term miracle refers to common things that point to an uncommon cause in the power of God.

A second way in which we use the term miracle is similar to the first. God may use natural events and weave a tapestry of history in such a way as the even occurred in a miraculous way.

Thirdly, miracles refer to acts of God against nature. This is the more technical usage of the term. Jesus' turning water in to wine or raising Lazarus from the dead are examples of God working against His laws of nature. There can be no natural explanation for these events. The single work miracle in the Bible is called signs, wonders and powers.

In the narrowest sense, we link miracles to the biblical word for sign.

God used miracles to prove or attest His agents of divine revelation (Heb 2:3-4). The Father authenticated the Son through the signs that He performed. True miracles happened in the Bible, but God ceased performing miracles once His revelation was established in Scripture.

God still works in the world in a supernatural way but no longer grants miracle-working power to human beings.

See also:

Exo 4:1-9 1 Kings 17:21-24 John 2:11 Heb 2:1-4

The Will of God

There are three meanings of the will of God.

(a) Sovereign decretive will, or hidden will, is the will which God brings to pass whatsoever He decrees. This is hidden to us until it happens. Because God is sovereign, and His will cannot be frustrated, we can be sure that nothing happens over which He is not in control. He at least "permits" whatever happens to happen. He always has the power and right to intervene and prevent the actions and events of this world.

(b) Perspective will is God's revealed law or commandments, which we have the power but not the right to break.

(c) Will of disposition describes God's attitude or disposition. It reveals what is pleasing to Him.

God's sovereign "permission" of human sin is not His moral approval. God takes no delight in the death of the wicked yet he surely wills or decrees the death of the wicked.

Many Christians become preoccupied or even obsessed with finding the "will" of God for their lives. If the will we are seeking is His secret, hidden, or decretive will, then our quest is a fool's errand. The secret council of God is His secret. He has not pleased to make it known to us. Far from being a mark of spirituality, the quest for God's secret will is an unwarranted invasion of God's privacy. God's secret council is none of our business. This is why the Bible takes such a negative view of fortune-telling, necromancy and other forms of prohibited practices.

We are to live our lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God. It is His revealed will that is our business, indeed, the chief business of our lives. It is the Godly person who meditates on God's law day and night.

See also:

John 19:11 Rom 9:14-28 Eph 1:11 Col 1:9-14 Heb 6:13-18 2 Pet 3:9

Covenant

The basic structure of the relationship God has established with His people is the covenant. Although God's covenant is like a contract it is not between equals. Covenants were made between God and Adam, Noah, Abraham, Moses and between Jesus and His church. This new covenant of grace was ratified by the shed blood of Christ upon the cross. At the heart of the covenant is God's promise of redemption.

See also:

Gen 15 Exo 20 Jer 31:31-34 Luke 22:20 Heb 8 Heb 13:20-21